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ABSTRACT

Numerous activities are described in this instructional unit designed to help teachers of elementary school students teach children the months of the year. Each activity is labeled as to its grade-level appropriateness, though teachers may adapt different activities to integrate them into their own classroom procedures. The activities, designed for kindergarten through the sixth grade, range from pupil involvement in singing and poetry to beginning use of research, the study of international holidays, evolution of modern calendars, and the etymological study of names of months. A sample listing of books about months and seasons is given by grade level. Resources for teachers are also included. (BJD)

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MONTHS OF THE YEAR: A TEACHING UNIT OF IDEAS

Adults who have first-hand experience with youngsters know that children have limited knowledge about time. A minute seems forever for them and a long-anticipated event, much to the chagrin of even the most patient parent, never seems to arrive. Telling a child that his birthday is "next week" or "next month" is an abstract concept which is not easily nor fully understood by children younger than age eight.

The irony is that teaching time to children takes time. Repeated exposures to any time concept (minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, etc.) assists children in the development of a schema which represents their notions of time. This article focuses on the information children acquire about the months of the year in elementary classrooms. The basic concepts of content are as follows:

(1) There are 12 months in a year, sequenced in a specific order.

(2) Calendars help people plan the events in their lives.

(3) Each month has a predetermined (and predictable) number of days in it.

(4) Special events and holidays are scheduled during the year.

(5) The movements of the earth around the sun ($365\frac{1}{4}$ days) marks the time period known as the year.

(6) One additional day is added to the calendar each

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fourth year (in February) to adjust for the ¼ day; this fourth year is called Leap Year.

(7) Several ancient cultures devised their own time-keeping methods but the modern calendar is the Gregorian calendar developed in the sixteenth century (1582).

(8) Seasons, dictated by the earth's movement around the sun, are also shown on calendars.

(9) Time-keeping devices are so precise that the moon's phases and sunrise and sunset can be predicted accurately many years ahead of time.

(10) Special calendars which contain facts about a wide variety of topics are called almanacs.

(11) The names of the months of the year have interesting etymologies.

The activities described below are suggestions teachers may use to teach the months of the year to their classes. Each activity is labeled as to its grade-level appropriateness, though teachers may adapt them to fit their own classroom procedures. A practical approach would be to incorporate the teaching ideas at various times throughout the school year to build upon students' previously-acquired foundation of knowledge.

- Purchase a commercial calendar or develop a teacher-made calendar to display in the classroom. Set a time each morning to talk about the date referring to specific historical events which make the date special. Fourth through sixth graders will receive educational value by preparing their own morning routines. Five to ten minute "It Happened This Date" activities could be

prepared for presentation to the entire school over the intercom system. Notable learning associated with this activity are making arrangements with the principal ahead of time, planning poems, songs and stories to signify the importance of the date and evaluating the quality of each program.

- Beautify the classroom environment with a classroom calendar tree. Select a limb with many branches on it and place it in a paint bucket filled with Plaster of Paris. Early in the month, ask the children to select a symbol which represents the month (hearts for February, for example, or footballs for September). Plan time for an art project allowing the children to create their own symbols to tie or hang on the tree. Inspire the children to do creative thinking, making individual and unique designs with bits of yarn, string, beads, sequins, paper doilies, buttons, styrofoam packing, etc. This activity is a good one for first through fourth graders.

- Bulletin boards which highlight the special dates of the month are a commonly-used teaching technique in classrooms of all ages. In grades five or six, the teacher could choose a team to be responsible for designing and putting up a bulletin board. In a similar activity, groups of three or four children could prepare the dates and artwork for assigned months. The teacher needs to provide posters or poster-sized pieces of butcher paper for the children's work.

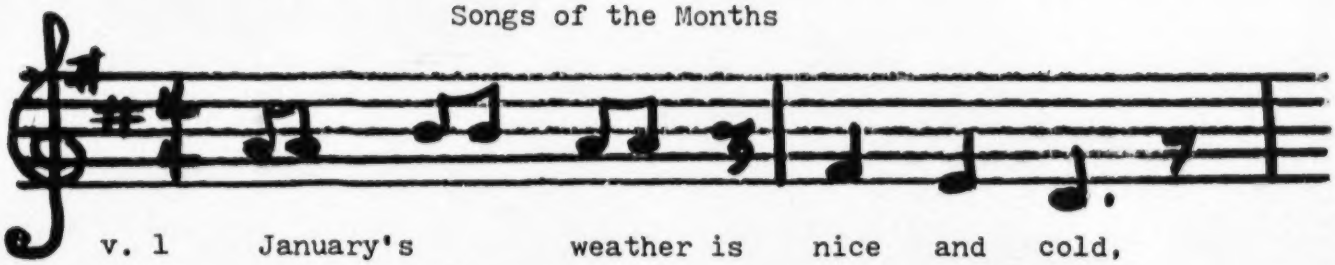
- Display posters of the presidents or famous people in the classroom during the month of their birthdays. Kindergarteners or first graderswould gain a sense of self-importance by bringing their pictures to display on a poster or bulletin

board entitled "Our November Birthdays" (or the name of the designated month). An older class of children might be challenged to start a school-wide effort to have a similar birthday listing for the entire school.

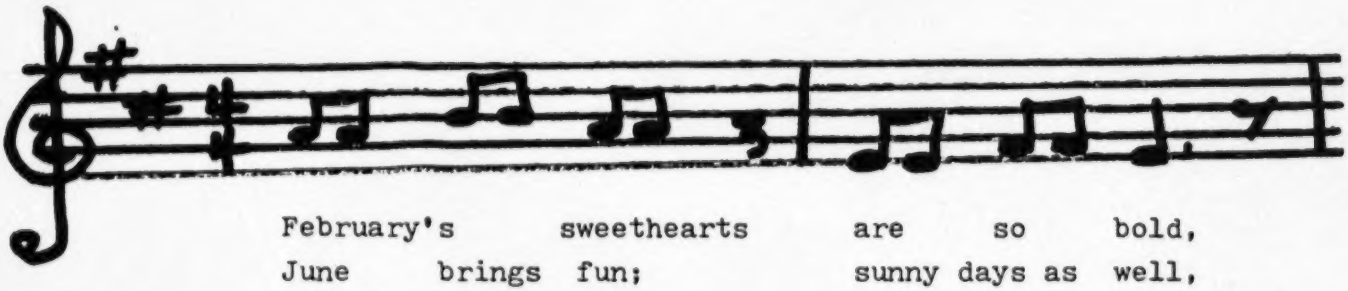
- Murals provide a certain fascination for children of all ages. Painting holiday scenes or cutting out individual pictures relating to the month (child-drawn or those found in magazines) and gluing them onto the mural are excellent ways to help children remember the importance of each month. Classroom or hall displays are attractive and make a distinctive statement about the learning children are doing.

- Songs, too, are available to help children learn about the months. Memorizing the sequence of the months would be aided with the cheery English or Spanish versions of the "Months of the Year" song on Steve Millang's and Greg Scelsa's We All Live Together (Volume 2). Another source of songs to use throughout the year is Action Songs for Holidays and Special Days by Ruth White and Jim Mandell. Most music textbooks have seasonal and holiday songs for each respective grade level. The teacher who feels inadequate about presenting music activities to her class should know about Biene's Sing Through the Seasons: Ninety-Nine Songs for Children (1972) and the accompanying record. Here is a song primary grade teachers can try:

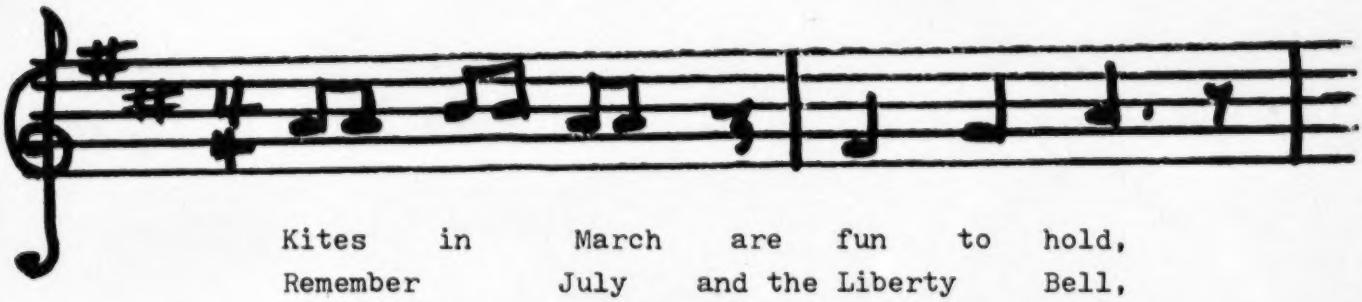
Songs of the Months



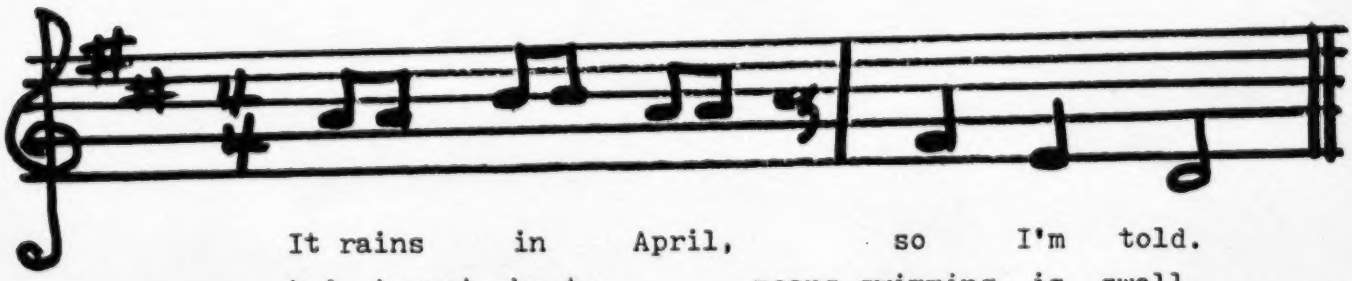
v. 1 January's weather is nice and cold,
v. 2 Flowers in May are sweet to smell,
v. 3 It's September, school days are here,



February's sweethearts are so bold,
June brings fun; sunny days as well,
Ghosts and witches stir October fear,



Kites in March are fun to hold,
Remember July and the Liberty Bell,
Then November! Thanksgiving is near,



It rains in April, so I'm told.
And August heat means swimming is swell.
At last, December is the end of the year.

- Keeping appropriate poems handy for ready teaching adds flavor to classroom routine. The "Days and Seasons" section of The Arbuthnot Anthology of Children's Literature (Revised Edition, 1976) is chock full of poems for children in all elementary grades. Learning the familiar "Thirty Days Hath September" nursery rhyme located in DeAngeli's Book of Nursery and Mother Goose Rhymes (1954) is a traditional activity for children, but other not-so-familiar rhymes are available in the same publication. Hillman's A Merry Mouse Book of Months (1980) and Patricia Scarry's "Merry Months of the Year" found in Richard Scarry's Best Story Book Ever (1971) are two additional sources of poetry. Older children could be stimulated to write their own suitable rhymes.

- Children's publications (such as My Weekly Reader, Highlights or Humpty Dumpty) are occasionally overlooked references for teaching months of the year. Motivate children to make a collection of calendars and almanacs, listen to daily news programs which focus on historical events or begin keeping diaries of school happenings. Monthly classroom newspapers also encourage learning about time. Help children think of catchy titles for their publications (such as The November News, The December Daily or The January Journal).

- Children in third grade and older will benefit by having personal calendars to keep at their desks. Measurement experiences are inherent in requiring each child to make his own calendar; however, this assignment could become quite time consuming. If school policy permits, request calendars from local banks, service stations, hardware or feed supply stores which they distribute for advertising purposes. Use the calendars to

teach children the difference and significance of short- and long-range planning. Charting special school dates or noteworthy community events will interest some children.

- A creative writing lesson for fourth or fifth graders can evolve when the teacher invites children to imagine that they are a space traveler who has landed on another planet which has weather peculiar to one specific month. The students write about their impressions of this new planet's year-long January-type (or April or August) weather. Discuss how the environment would be affected and what restrictions would be placed on activities before children begin writing.

Beginning research techniques are often presented to fifth and sixth graders. Most schools and communities have libraries, agencies, and resources which augment any classroom study. The following research topics and correlated activities are appropriate for fifth and sixth graders.

- Read A January Fog Will Freeze a Hog (Davis, 1977) to the class. Make a collection of verses, adages, or colloquial sayings which pertain to each month. Begin a classroom booklet depicting each statement. Children can even try writing their own rhymes or proverbs.

- Explore the evolution of the modern-day calendar. Discover how the Babylonians, Egyptians, Romans and Indians developed time-keeping systems. Set aside one day as "Ancient Culture Day" and use historical time-keeping methods to get through the day. Key school personnel (the principal or the cafeteria staff) will

need to know in advance that this activity is being attempted.

- The study of international holidays is another area of research to investigate. An inexpensive calendar which discusses prominent international holidays is available from UNICEF. UNICEF's address is:

United States Committee for UNICEF
Dept. ICCC
331 Eash 38th Street
New York, NY 10016

- An etymological study of the names of the months is an absorbing endeavor. An excellent resource for obtaining this information is the World Book Encyclopedia. Develop connected studies of the flowers and gems of each month. Later, ask children to participate in a poster contest which shows what they have learned about the months. Though some children will not want to enter the contest, others will respond by organizing and creating a poster for every month.

- Survey the school and community to determine how the names of the months are used in other ways. Persons, stores, brand names, movies, etc., are possible name categories.

- Children (and teachers, too) will discover unlimited areas of interest to study in almanacs. The World Almanac and Book of Facts published annually by the Newspaper Enterprise Association, Incorporated, is a relevant source for studying months of the year. Many states publish almanacs and can be checked out in school or community libraries.

- Many libraries receive information from the National Weather Service. Maps, weekly and monthly weather reports, facts about volcanoes, hurricanes, air masses and air movements are just a few of the publications available in the

documents section of the library. A good follow-up activity would be a field trip to a nearby weather station.

- Let children organize a game called "Calendar Feud" which resembles the popular television show Family Feud. The class could work in teams with certain members being in charge of writing the survey questions pertaining to the months and special events in the year. Later, play the game just for fun.

- Bring in grocery store advertisement supplements from the local newspaper. Stress the economic wisdom in becoming a consumer who buys produce which is grown in specific months. Invite the county's farm agent to come to class and tell the students about the crops which are grown in the local area.

- Sports fans will delight in examining the games which are most popular during certain months of the year. Invite athletes to class to explain their sports to the children. Football followers should know about Julian May's series of books on well-known football players and their teams (published by Crestwood House in Mankato, Minnesota).

- Numerous books about months and seasons are suitable for children. A sample listing is shown below by grade level:

Grades K-1

Allington, Richard and Kathleen Krull. Beginning to Learn About Autumn. Milwaukee: Raintree Publishers, Inc., 1981.

Allington, Richard and Kathleen Krull. Beginning to Learn About Spring. Milwaukee: Raintree Publishers, Inc., 1981.

Allington, Richard and Kathleen Krull. Beginning to Learn About Summer. Milwaukee: Raintree Publishers, Inc., 1981.

Allington, Richard and Kathleen Krull. Beginning to Learn About Winter. Milwaukee: Raintree Publishers, Inc., 1981.

Brandenberg, Aliki. June 7. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

DePaola, Tomi. Four Stories for Four Seasons. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977.

Martin, Jr., Bill. June Bugs. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Education Corporation, 1975.

Grades 2-3

Branley, Franklyn M. Sunshine Makes the Seasons. New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1974.

Christian, Mary Blount. April Fool. New York: Macmillan, 1981.

Epstein, Samuel and Beryl Epstein. Spring Holidays. Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1964.

Hillman, Priscilla. A Merry Mouse Book of Months. Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday, 1980.

Parish, Peggy. December Decorations: A Holiday How-To Book. New York: Macmillan Company, 1975.

Sendak, Cass R. Easter. New York: Franklin Watts, 1980.

Sendak, Cass R. Halloween. New York: Franklin Watts, 1980.

Sendak, Cass R. Thanksgiving. New York: Franklin Watts, 1980.

Sendak, Cass R. Valentine's Day. New York: Franklin Watts, 1980.

Scarry, Richard. Best Story Book Ever. New York: Golden Press, 1971.

Shannon, Terry. Come Summer, Come Winter. Chicago: Albert Whitman and Company, 1968.

Grades 4-6

Arthur, Mildred. Holidays of Legend. New York: Harvey House, 1971.

Barth, Edna. Turkeys, Pilgrims, and Indian Corn. New York: Clarion Books, 1975.

Davis, Hubert. A January Fog Will Freeze a Hog. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1977.

Doty, Jean Slaughter. Summer Pony. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

Doty, Jean Slaughter. Winter Pony. New York: Macmillan, 1975.

Hanson, June Andrea. Summer of the Stallion. New York: Macmillan, 1979.

Resources for Teachers

Arbuthnot, May Hill, et. al. The Arbuthnot Anthology of Children's Literature. Zena Sutherland. Editor (Fourth Edition). Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1976.

Biene, Susanna. Sing Through the Seasons: Ninety-Nine Songs for Children. Rifton, New York: Plough Publishing House, 1972.

DeAngeli, Marguerite. Book of Nursery and Mother Goose Rhymes. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954.

Millang, Steve and Greg Scelsa. We All Live Together, (Volume 2). Los Angeles, California: Youngheart Music Education Service, 1978.

White, Ruth and Alexandra Kusion-Rowe. Happy Holidays Activities for Fun and Learning. Los Angeles, California: Rhythms Productions, 1980.

White, Ruth and Jim Mandell. Action Songs for Holidays and Special Days. Los Angeles, California: Tom Thumb Music, 1979.

Teaching the topic titled "Months of the Year" is an everyday occurrence. With a bit of ingenuity and teacher creativity, however, the door can open to a broader spectrum of learning. It's a fascinating study for children but teachers may be surprised at what they can learn, too. "Months of the Year" merits more than just casual instruction.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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